

# Minnesota Orchestra musicians forced to accept massive cuts

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The lockout of the musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra came to an end on Tuesday as management imposed a full regime of cuts and restructuring onto the 111 year-old orchestra and its musicians. The musicians fought courageously for 16 months in opposition to the Minnesota Orchestral Association's (MOA) unrelenting efforts to slash wages, increase health care costs, and reorganize the orchestra along a new anti-social and pro-corporate model. Their defeat at the hands of Minnesota's political and financial elite marks another step in the nationwide assault on the social right to culture.

The new three-year contract cuts pay by 15 percent in 2014, with insignificant increases of 2 and 3 percent over 2015 and 2016, respectively. The contract also raises musician health care payments by up to \$2,300 each year.

In addition to reducing the living standards of the orchestra musicians, the contract also requires that the musicians make unpaid performances throughout the contract period.

The size of the orchestra will be reduced from its full complement of 95 members. The MOA refuses to hire more than 77 musicians in the first year, and caps orchestra membership at 79 in the second year, and 84 in the third year. The quality of the performances will suffer as a result.

Tuesday's agreement marks the end of a protracted fight between the musicians, who sought to preserve not only their wages, but also the cultural heritage of the Minnesota Orchestra.

The lockout began on October 1, 2012, when the bank executives, corporate CEOs, and heirs and heiresses who serve on the MOA's Board of Directors demanded musicians take pay cuts of up to fifty percent and submit to a series of measures that would reduce

operation costs. When the musicians soundly rejected the proposal, management locked the doors to the orchestra hall. Notably, the MOA made no concessions on governorship or programming and instead issued a hollow pledge to engage musicians in the future.

From the beginning, the Minnesota political establishment—almost entirely comprised of Democrats (known as the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party—DFL in Minnesota)—has lined up behind the MOA and against the musicians. DFL Governor Mark Dayton and then-Mayor RT Rybak (also DFL) accepted the framework of MOA's claims that drastic cuts were needed, and lauded the MOA for having “very legitimate” interests. They further noted that they were “not going to take sides” in the dispute, and re-emphasized their “neutrality” in mid-September, 2013.

Such moves amounted to a giving of the green light to the MOA to continue its ruthless assault on the Minnesota Orchestra, a world-class cultural institution which is a source of pride for the population of Minnesota and of the northern Midwest region.

The state's main bourgeois newspaper, which is closely connected to the Democrats and whose CEO sits on the MOA Board of Directors, was less tacit in its hostility to the musicians. The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* peddled the MOA's lie that there is “no money” for public culture:

“The Minnesota Orchestra, in its current form, and perhaps at its current level of excellence, cannot be sustained. As much as both sides would like to think the orchestra is all about the art, it's really, at this dreadful moment, all about the money. There is simply not enough of it.”

With the support of the DFL machine and of the bourgeois press, the MOA has carried out a campaign of attrition and intimidation that has threatened to

destroy the orchestra. From the very beginning, the musicians have been forced to negotiate under a state of constant duress as the threat of massive wage cuts is held over their heads. The newspapers have constantly pointed to the relatively high wages of the musicians in an attempt to turn the most backwards elements of the population against the musicians.

Even though the musicians will begin work in February, they will do so under conditions in which the status of the orchestra has been severely battered by the actions of the MOA. Over the course of the lockout, dozens of respected musicians left the orchestra to seek work in other orchestras across the world. Some of those musicians signed one-year contracts and may choose to return to Minnesota, but it is unclear how many will do so.

The biggest blow to the Orchestra came in October 2013, when long-time orchestra conductor Osmo Vanska announced his resignation after negotiations fell through due to the intransigence of management. When the musicians unanimously rejected an offer for 25 percent pay cuts that same week, the MOA punished the musicians by canceling two scheduled concerts at Carnegie Hall and thereby ruining the opportunity for talented musicians to play in the nation's most esteemed concert venue.

But despite the overwhelming support of the population, who showed up in loyal droves to attend public benefit concerts held by the musicians, the musicians were left isolated by the trade union apparatus, which attempted to channel the genuine anger felt by many Minnesotans and to prevent the struggle of the musicians from taking a political, and therefore anti-DFL, character.

The musicians' position was even further weakened by the policies of the Obama administration. Sources close to the musicians indicated that the musicians were within weeks of having their unemployment benefits cut off. In other words, it is partly because the Obama administration, the Democrats, and the Republicans have refused to extend unemployment benefits that the musicians were pressured to accept massive cuts.

The musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra are only the latest to suffer the imposition of wage cuts. They join the ranks of musicians at symphony orchestras in Philadelphia, Phoenix, Detroit, Houston, Cincinnati,

Seattle, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Nashville, Baltimore, Atlanta, Virginia, San Francisco, North Carolina, Utah and many other cities throughout the United States.

In the aftermath of the agreement, Minneapolis' newly-elected "progressive" DFL Mayor Betsy Hodges attempted to sweep the event under the carpet, proclaiming that management, the musicians and the population should "all come together and work on rebuilding trust in our community."



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